

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 MCT-01 ACDA-07 TRSE-00 DHA-02 /065 W

-----130558Z 049033 /14

R 130249Z APR 77

FM AMCONSUL CEBU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 281

INFO AMEMBASSY MANILA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 CEBU 0020

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, RP

SUBJECT: SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES REACTION TO MINDANAO CRISIS

SUMMARY: CONCERNED RESIDENTS OF CEBU AND DAVAO SEE NO PEACEFUL OUTCOME POSSIBLE FROM CURRENT GOP EFFORTS TO FIND POLITICAL FORMULA ACCEPTABLE TO BOTH MNLF/QADHAFI AND CHRISTIAN MAJORITY IN PROPOSED "AUTONOMOUS REGION." ONE SIDE OR THE OTHER IS EXPECTED TO OBJECT VIOLENTLY TO WHATEVER DEVELOPS. GOP IS QUIETLY DISTRIBUTING WEAPONS TO CHRISTIAN RESIDENTS, INCREASING THE LIKELIHOOD OF AN ETHNIC BLOODBATH WHEN POLITICAL EFFORTS INEVITABLY FAIL TO SATISFY BOTH SIDES. END SUMMARY.

1. NO ISSUE SINCE DECLARATION OF MARTIAL LAW IN 1972 HAS AROUSED MORE ALARM AMONG SOUTHERN FILIPINOS THAN PRESIDENT MARCOS' PROCLAMATION OF MUSLIM-ORIENTED "AUTONOMOUS REGION" IN WESTERN MINDANAO. THERE IS WIDESPREAD EXPECTATION THAT MNLF WILL NOT ACCEPT GOP INTERPRETATION OF QADHAFI-MARCOS EXCHANGE OF NOTES, AND THAT CHRISTIAN MAJORITY WILL NOT ACCEPT MNLF INTERPRETATION. CONCERNED CITIZENS EXPECT EITHER MUSLIMS OR LOCAL CHRISTIANS TO REACT VIOLENTLY. THEY PREDICT INTENSE INTERCOMMUNAL BLOODBATH AS SOON AS APRIL 17 REFERENDUM INDICATES WHICH SIDE "WON" THE POLITICAL ROUND.

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2. CONSULATE HAS RECEIVED NUMEROUS REPORTS THAT GOP IS DISTRIBUTING ARMS ON LARGE SCALE TO CHRISTIAN CIVILIANS IN THE "AUTONOMOUS REGION" THROUGH MUNICIPAL MAYORS AND BARRIO-LEVEL CIVILIAN HOME DEFENSE FORCE (CNDF) UNITS. WE HAVE ALSO HEARD THAT ANTI-MUSLIM EXTREMISTS GROUPS SUCH AS "ILAGA" AND "CHRISTIAN LIBERATION FRONT" ARE REACTIVATING AND MAY BE RECEIVING GOVERNMENT ARMS INDIRECTLY. AT LEAST ONE PROVINCIAL GOVERNOR (LANAO NORTE'S

QUIBRANZA) AND MANY LOCAL OFFICIALS IN THE REGION HAVE HISTORY OF EXTREMIST AFFILIATION. PHIL ARMY 3RD DIVISION COMMANDER BG EVIDENTE TOLD THE CONSULATE LAST MONTH THAT IF PEACE AGREEMENT FAILS, HIS BIGGEST JOB WILL BE TO KEEP CHRISTIAN CIVILIANS FROM RUNNING WILD AGAINST MUSLIM NEIGHBORS. MODERATE CHURCH LEADERS IN DAVAO WORRY ABOUT A "HOLY WAR" IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

3. GOP HAS DONE WHAT IT COULD THROUGH "BLACK PROPAGANDA" TO DISCREDIT MNLF IN ORDER TO INCREASE CHRISTIAN SUPPORT FOR ITS BARGAINING POSITION. MAIN RESULT HAS BEEN TO INCREASE ETHNIC TENSION EVEN MORE. CEBU CITY OFFICIAL TOLD CONSUL EARLY APRIL THAT CITY MIMOGRAPHED "HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS" OF COPIES OF MNLF DRAFT PRESIDENTIAL DECREE (MANILA 3261) LAST MONTH AT GOP REQUEST FOR WIDE DISTRIBUTION BY MINDANAO GOVERNORS.

4. CONSUL VISITED DAVAO CITY MARCH 30-APRIL 1 AND FOUND CONSIDERABLE CONFUSION AND APPREHENSION IN MINDANAO'S LARGEST CITY. OF PARTICULAR LOCAL CONCERN WAS WHETHER DAVAO CITY ITSELF IS CONSIDERED SOMEHOW RELATED TO DAVAO SUR PROVINCE AND IS THUS PART OF AUTONOMOUS REGION. MARCOS SAID CATEGORICALLY ON MARCH 29 TALKATHON THAT CITY IS NOT INCLUDED. HOWEVER, PC COMMANDER LTC BACCAY (RESPONSIBLE FOR DAVAO SUR AND DAVAO CITY) TOLD CONSUL THAT A LIBYAN CEASEFIRE OBSERVER HAD TOLD HIM SUBSEQUENTLY THAT DAVAO CITY DEFINITELY IS INCLUDED. ACTING MAYOR ALSO TOLD CONSUL HE WOULD BELIEVE MARCOS' STATEMENT ONLY WHEN HE READS IT IN A PRESIDENTIAL DECREE. DAVAO CITY ACKNOWLEDGES ITSELF AS AN R&R CENTER FOR BOTH GOP AND MNLF TROOPS AND HAS ONLY A TINY RESIDENT MUSLIM POPULATION.

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 283  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 CEBU 0020

5. IN AN EARLY MARCH INCIDENT IN MUSLIM BARRIO ON SOUTHERN EDGE OF DAVAO CITY, SOME 300 ARMED MNLF TROOPS LANDED FROM SOUTH

COTABATO IN EFFORT TO GAIN CONTROL OF ONLY HIGHWAY TO DAVAO SUR (BACCAY TOLD CONSUL THAT PRESS DELIBERATELY REPORTED ONLY 50 TROOPS LANDED TO AVOID ALARMING POPULACE). BACCAY EVENTUALLY FORCED THEIR DEPARTURE BY SURROUNDING BARRIO AND THREATENING TO KILL EVERYONE INSIDE "INCLUDING MUSLIM WOMEN AND CHILDREN." DURING THEIR STAY THEIR LEADER, A MUSLIM CONVERT WHO WAS ONCE A DAVAO CITY ATTORNEY, VISITED CITY HALL AND DEMANDED OFFICE SPACE AND STAFF FOR HIS "HEADQUARTERS" BUT WAS TOSSED OUT BY MAYOR. MAYOR LATER TOLD PRESS INTERVIEWERS THAT NEXT TIME HE APPEARED THAT LEADER WOULD BE ARRESTED ON OLD GRAFT CHARGES AND THAT HE WOULD "ARM THE WHOLE CITY" BEFORE ALLOWING MNLF TO TAKE UP RESIDENCE IN DAVAO CITY HALL.

6. DAVAO-BASED REGIONAL CATHOLIC ACTIVISTS ARE UNDECIDED HOW TO GUIDE THEIR FLOCK ON THE APRIL 17 REFERENDUM BUT CONCEDE THAT "THE PEOPLE WANT TO VOTE AND THEY KNOW WHAT TO VOTE FOR." DIRECTOR OF MINDANAO-SULU PASTORAL CONFERENCE, WHICH INTER ALIA COORDINATES MINDANAO BISHOPS' POLITICAL STANCE, GAVE CONSUL AN INTERNAL DOCUMENT LISTING PROS AND CONS OF RECOMMENDING YES, NO, AND BOYCOTT, AND CONCLUDING THAT NONE IS SATISFACTORY. THE PAPER REJECTS BOTH GOP AND MNLF POSITIONS: THE GOP'S BECAUSE IT "DOES NOT MEET SQUARELY THE MUSLIM PROBLEM NOR DOES IT MANIFEST SERIOUSNESS IN SOLVING THE MINDANAO SITUATION," AND THE MNLF'S  
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BECAUSE IT ALIENATES THE CHRISTIAN MAJORITY AND IS "IMPRACTICAL AND NOT FEASIBLE."

7. COMMENT: WHATEVER TIGHTROPE WALK THE DECISION-MAKERS ARE ATTEMPTING IN MANILA, IMPLEMENTATION IN THE MUSLIM AREA IS LIKELY TO BE CARRIED OUT BY THE MORE PANICKY, BIGOTED ELEMENTS. THE WHOLESALe ARMING OF CHRISTIAN CIVILIANS AND CHDF'S IS A PARTICULARLY OMINOUS SIGN. WE EXPECT THE PEACE-AND-ORDER SITUATION IN WESTERN MINDANAO COULD GET WORSE IN THE NEAR FUTURE THAN IT WAS BEFORE THE CEASE-FIRE, SINCE ONE SIDE OR THE OTHER IS BOUND TO FEEL DOUBLE-CROSSED BY GOP AND THEREFORE OBLIGED TO TAKE MATTERS INTO ITS OWN HANDS.  
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